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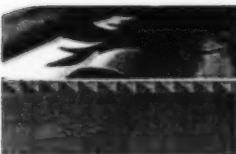
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CANADA'S NEW GOVERNMENT MARKS WORLD WATER DAY

REPORTS ON PROGRESS TO IMPROVE WATER QUALITY ON RESERVE; LAUNCHES WATER KIT FOR FIRST NATIONS CHILDREN

OTTAWA , Ontario (March 22, 2007) - The Honourable Jim Prentice, Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, today on World Water Day tabled a report in Parliament that details the improvements that have been made over the past 12 months on water quality on reserve.

A year ago, Minister Prentice announced a Plan of Action to ensure that all First Nations communities have access to clean, safe drinking water.

"We have made substantial progress during the past year," he said. "We have addressed the most pressing issues in communities. In the last 12 months the number of high risk water systems in First Nations communities has been reduced from 193 to 97.

"Last year we also identified 21 priority communities. Today I am pleased to report that in seven of the 21 communities, the water problems have been addressed. They are no longer on that list."

A 24-hour hotline and emergency support system has been put in place and, as announced this week in Federal Budget 2007, the Minister said, "We are committed to putting a tough regulatory regime in place on reserves, including new standards."

Today, Health Minister Tony Clement unveiled a school activity kit developed especially for First Nations teachers and children, along with his colleagues, Minister Prentice and the Honourable John Baird, Minister of the Environment.

"Canada has the third-largest supply of fresh water in the world and through initiatives like the Water is a Treasure tool kit, this Government is taking action to improve the water Canadians drink," said Minister Baird. "In Budget 2007, Canada's New Government committed \$93 million over the next two years to a National Water Strategy to clean up polluted waters,

help maintain water levels in the Great Lakes and protect our ecosystem."

"I am pleased to support such a wonderful initiative through which teachers and Environmental Health Officers can play a key role in educating children on how important it is to their health to keep water safe and clean," said Minister Clement. "Water is vital and Canada's New Government is committed to working with First Nations to protect it."

The school kit was developed by INAC, Health Canada and Environment Canada in consultation with the Assembly of First Nations, and is now being sent to First Nations schools and schools where more than 20 per cent of the student population is First Nation. It is also being sent to 42 Band Councils north of 60° (in Yukon and N.W.T.), and to the three territorial Departments of Education.

The activity school kit contains a teacher's guide, poster, CD, and a series of activities that teachers can use with children from Kindergarten to Grade 6. It is available on-line.

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Water School Kit for First Nations Children

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Why was a water school kit produced for First Nations children?

Water is a Treasure was designed to:

- Increase awareness among First Nations children from Kindergarten to Grade 6 of the importance of clean, safe and reliable water.
- Supplement school curriculum with games and activities that promote the protection of water. Games include a water detective game, colouring sheets, matching game, a maze, draw me a story, write me a story, science activities and trivia cards.
- Provide materials for teachers that encourage children to exchange information about water habits at home, in their community, and help them recognize what they can do to protect water.

Why are you involving children?

This kit recognizes that we all have a role to play in protecting water, including children.

Involving children by coaching them on how to protect water as a national treasure is consistent with the government's objectives to make access to safe drinking water a co-ordinated effort.

Were First Nations teachers consulted?

Research and interviews were conducted with First Nations teachers in 10 First Nations schools across Canada prior to designing the kit. This was done to determine what kind of material would best appeal to First Nations children.

Once designed, the games and activities incorporated comments from First Nations children and teachers.

Was this kit tested with First Nations children?

Yes, *Water is a Treasure* was sent to two First Nations schools in Ontario for their feedback from students in Grade 1 to Grade 6.

Their reaction was positive. For example, both younger and older students gave us positive feedback on the poster. This large and colourful poster

doubles as a game, "Water Detectives", designed to engage and instruct children on safe and healthy water use in their communities.

The goal of "Water Detectives" is to find the images in the poster key on the poster. These images depict actions that are best for us, the water and the environment or actions that can harm us, the water and the environment.

Several students, particularly the older ones, were interested in the poster and enjoyed searching out the positive and negative uses of water within the images. Not only did the poster grab the attention of the older students but it evoked strong feelings from them about the importance of water to their community.

Younger students especially enjoyed the bright colour scheme and the learning activities. As with the older group, the poster led to an unprompted discussion on issues related to water within their community.

Did you receive any feedback from other First Nations?

Yes. The water school kit was showcased Feb. 6-8, 2007 in Toronto at the National Housing and Water Policy Forum and Tradeshow hosted by the Assembly of First Nations. Feedback from several Chiefs was highly positive.

What role did Health Canada and Environment Canada play in this project?

Health Canada and Environment Canada were partners in this project. The Assembly of First Nations was consulted during the creation of the kit and has endorsed the project.

Is this kit part of the First Nations School curriculum?

No. *Water is a Treasure* is supplementary material and to be used as the teacher sees fit. Furthermore, the kit can be used outside of the classroom in a variety of settings such as summer camps and after-school programs.

How much did the water kit cost?

Production, printing and shipping of the school kit cost \$185,000.

What is the distribution plan for the kit?

Some 6,885 kits are being sent to 557 schools nationwide that are either operated by the Band, and to federally or provincially operated schools where more than 20 per cent of the student population is First Nation.

It is also being sent to 42 Band Councils north of 60° (in Yukon and N.W.T.), and to the three territorial Departments of Education.

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